DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 843 EA 013 735

TITLE	The Administrative Leadership Team. Superintendent Career Development Series No. 5.
INSTITUTION	American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.: National School Boards Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	32p.
AVAILABLE FROM	American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209 (Stock No. 021-00820: $3.50).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrative Change: Administrative Organization: Administrator Role: Board of Education Role: Educational Administration: Elementary Secondary Education: *Management Teams: Organizational Change
IDENTIFIERS	Participative Management

ABSTRACT

Using team management in school district administration requires compromises on the part of the board, the superintendent, and the other team members, but advantages can result. Better quality decisions, higher staff morale, greater support for decisions, and more efficient management are among the potential benefits. The first step in development of the team is establishment of a written school board policy concerning the team's purpose, role, authority, makeup, responsibilities, and available resources. The team must be organized with such factors as the district's size, the superintendent's style, staff morale, local education crises, and the effect of labor agreements on administration taken into account. Several options for team structure are available. The team should develop a written operating plan incorporating the board's policy statement, a description of team structure, a schedule of meetings, a statement of purpose, a monitoring mechanism, and procedural guidelines. The final ingredients are involvement of all team members, thorough communications, and respect for team members and the team concept. (Author/PGD)

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Superintendent Career Development Series No. 5

The Administrative Leadership Team

A Joint Publication of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association

EA 013 235

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The Administrative Leadership Team

$3.50

Prepared for
the American Association of
School Administrators

Reviewed and Approved by
The Joint AASA-NSBA Committee

Published by the American Association of
School Administrators, 1801 North Moore Street,
Arlington, Virginia 22209

Superintendent Career Development Series

Books in this series include:

Guidelines for the Preparation of School Administrators

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The Superintendent's Contract

Compensating the Superintendent (Summary Report)

The Administrative Leadership Team

Evaluating the Superintendent

A full report on **Compensating the Superintendent** is also available through the American Association of School Administrators.

Stock No. 021-00820

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Arlington, Virginia 22209

Library of Congress Card Number 79-54927

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Foreword

The superintendent who tries to go it alone in this increasingly complex world is riding for a fall, and the school board that insists on it is only fooling itself.

Today's school district provides such a vast array of specialized services that no one individual, however brilliant he or she may be, can absorb all the details needed to make the right decision every time.

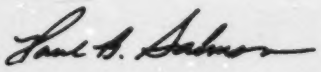
Meanwhile, administrative groups around the country are making noises ominously like those of the teacher organizations. Their complaints are valid in many cases. They are responsible, they say, for carrying out policies and programs they had no hand in developing. They feel they are "management" in name only. And they are turning more and more to the negotiations arena to resolve their identity crisis.

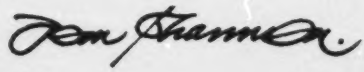
The superintendent, of course, is caught in the middle. The school board, whose function is governance rather than management, holds the superintendent accountable for what happens in the district. But on the other hand, the disaffection of middle management completes the squeeze on the superintendent, whose survival, after all, hinges on the decisions he or she makes. And those decisions hinge on information coming from the field.

Is there a way out of this dilemma?

Many school districts think so, and have turned to a concept that has become popular in recent education literature. Examples are popping up all over the country. The exact names vary from place to place, and so do the techniques. No one system is identical to any other. But there is one common thread running through each of them: *the commitment to work as a team* to improve education for children in the classroom.

This publication has been reviewed and approved by the Joint AASA-NSBA Committee, itself a demonstration of teamwork in American education. We hope **The Administrative Leadership Team** serves as a valuable resource for you and your school system.





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Preface

The leaders of virtually all educational organizations have gone on record supporting what they call "participative management" through the "administrative team."

When the presidents and executive directors of ten professional organizations joined forces to create the Educational Leaders Consortium (ELC) "to intensify cooperation and collaboration on educational issues of mutual concern to their members," they chose as their first target the administrative team concept.

Consider the leaders of these groups endorsing the same movement. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA), Association of School Business Officials (ASBO), Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), National Association of Pupil Personnel Administrators (NAPPA), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), National School Boards Association (NSBA), and National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).

While their respective constituencies approach the business of public education from very different—and often even conflicting—points of view, the fact that these leaders could unite behind any single cause is the strongest possible endorsement. So whether you are a board member wanting the best information on which to base a decision, or a superintendent striving for more efficient management, or any other administrator seeking some way to influence the decisions that affect what goes on in the classroom, the answer seems to reside in a concept that has many names, but one goal: teamwork.

While such phrases as "participative management" and "administrative team" are becoming common around the country, what they represent varies radically from district to district and state to state. Some approaches work very well. Others are merely labels attached to existing hierarchical structures.

Here, then, is a roadmap to guide you through the maze of labels and slogans and over the pitfalls into a workable "administrative team" structure for your school district.

Chapter 1

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

From Now on It's "We"

Before you get out the organization chart and start drawing lines and circles, hold up a minute. Ask yourself these questions: Is the team approach really for us? Will the people in our organization be willing, and able, to work comfortably as a team? Does a union situation stand in the way of true across-the-board cooperation? Think about it carefully, because the effort is guaranteed to fail unless there is a total commitment on the part of everyone concerned to make it work.

Here are some of the implications:

- The ***school board,*** though of course retaining its statutory policy-making authority, and its primary role as representative of people in the local community, will have to commit itself formally to the team concept. This could mean agreeing to more built-in delays and even frustrations in certain areas of decision-making. If the input of the team is to be considered important, enough time must be allowed for team members to get information, digest it, and transmit their contributions.

- The ***superintendent*** must, in effect, be willing to relinquish some absolute authority. While still responsible for the final decision, he or she will have to rely heavily on the contributions of the team up to the moment of truth. And there

must be the understanding that if that input is ignored too often, the team will begin to disintegrate.

• The ***other members of the team,*** especially the school-based administrators, must be willing to devote the increased time their new role requires. And they must become enthusiastic philosophical converts, too. They can no longer blame "those people up there in the central office." From now on, it is "we." Real teamwork means that each member accepts decisions made as the result of the process, whether fully agreeing with them or not, and tries sincerely to make them work.

In other words, launching an administrative team in a school district, no matter how large or small, is not a move to be taken lightly. And it cannot be done overnight. Once you've convinced yourself that the commitments are there, it takes a lot of staff involvement and planning to come up with a comprehensive set of procedures based on a concrete board policy.

The Advantages of the Team

So why bother with team management?

The answer to that question is that it's well worth the trouble. When a team is working smoothly, it can count up these advantages:

Better Quality Decisions

It stands to reason that the better the information on which a decision is based, the better the decision. And the greater the input from the people affected by the decision, the more likely the decision will reflect the actual needs of the district. The team approach requires the pooling of diverse information from diverse points of view, leading to a healthy debate and ultimately the best decision, whether it is made at the

middle management level, by the superintendent, or by the board.

Higher Staff Morale

Studies have shown that participative management lessens tension and aggression, and fosters greater job satisfaction. The result, of course, is higher efficiency and creativity.

Greater Support

When the people in the field are involved in making the decision, they are far more likely to implement it than if it came down as a pronouncement from on high. They also will be more loyal to the superintendent and the system as a whole.

More Efficient Management

There is more to it than just the increased motivation that comes from higher morale, although that certainly is a part of it. Middle managers, as part of the team, are better informed about the entire picture and are therefore better equipped to handle a problem at its source. Since the team functions by involving affected personnel in solving problems, it keeps decision-making at the administrative level nearest the problem.

The list of potential advantages goes on and on, but they all come back to two basic factors. Involving key people in decision-making brings forth the best information on which to base the decision. And the involvement increases each team member's sense of belonging, which results in greater productivity and support.

So now you've decided it's worth the effort.

Where do you go from here?

Chapter 2

PUT IT IN WRITING:

Start with Board Policy

The best place to start is at the beginning: with a well-thought-out, comprehensive board policy. Once again, this is a task that should not be taken lightly, because it is the cornerstone upon which the entire structure will be built. While this policy should not spell out operational details, it should address the basic philosophical issues, leaving no doubt of the board's commitment and the staff's obligations.

In most cases, policies of this type are written by task forces who study successful operations in other areas, inject those factors peculiar to the home district, and prepare a draft for the superintendent to take to the board. That procedure is fine, with the added caution to build in as much involvement of middle management as possible during the developmental period.

Main Elements

The policy should contain these elements:

- The board's belief that the concept of the administrative team will ***improve the overall governance of the district.*** This means committing itself to considering the team's deliberations before making its decisions, as well as spelling out the responsibilities of the district administrators in the team process.

- ***The legal standing of the team itself.*** Generally, it should clarify that the superintendent is still accountable for the decisions, and that the

team will act in an advisory capacity. The superintendent will serve as the team's leader, and all communication between the team and the board must go through the superintendent.

- ***A provision for members of the team to appeal to the board.*** Managers within the system should be able to address the board on differing points of view, but this must be done with the knowledge of the superintendent, who as a rule sets up board agendas.

- ***The makeup of the team itself.*** Members should represent central office instructional and support programs as well as school principals. In fact every administrator should be, by definition, a member of the team, giving the reassurance that the decisions to be made will be better ones, with provisions for representatives to serve in liaison roles and actually attend meetings. Note that there is no suggestion here that any representative of the board itself actually serve as a member, or even attend team meetings.

- ***The specific tasks the board delegates to the team.*** What areas of decision-making are, by definition, a function of the team, in addition to specific questions raised by the board and the superintendent during the course of the year? The distinction between governance and administration should be clear. The efficiency of the district, moreover, would suffer dramatically if the team were to spin its wheels over administrative trivia.

- ***The willingness of the board to devote two precious resources to the cause: time and money.*** There must be, in other words, the understanding that this process will take more time in answering what used to be a simple request. More information must go from the board to the

staff to be digested and debated. Then and only then can the decision be made on what to recommend to the board. The dollar figure, relatively speaking, does not have to be a hefty one, but the team concept does require a more extensive sophisticated system of internal communication than most school districts are likely to have.

This board policy, then, sets the mood and the ground rules for the operation of the administrative team. It is now up to the superintendent to get it moving.

Chapter 3

START THE BALL ROLLING:

What to Consider in Getting Organized

So now the board has spoken and commanded the staff to go forth, regroup, and return as a new entity—a team.

Unfortunately, a school district staff would find it difficult enough to go away for a weekend, let alone the month or two it might take to get everything in operating order. Perhaps a retreat for a limited number of key people to plan for the planning would be appropriate. But for the most part the work will have to be done right along with the routine daily chores.

If building the team were a journey, we would look on the board's policy as the itinerary. Policy tells you where to go. But it doesn't, and shouldn't tell you how to get there. The road map itself, complete with a few detours and maybe a freeway or two, is the responsibility of the superintendent and the staff. And it is not going to be easy.

There is no single model that could be transplanted anywhere else in the country without major revisions. Each district is unique, and if the team plan does not take into consideration the factors that make it unique, it probably will not succeed.

School District Characteristics

Here are some of the characteristics of a school district that must be considered in developing a team plan:

- Its size, both in staff and in square miles.
- The local negotiations picture, especially as it affects administrators, as well as the legal status of collective bargaining.
- The superintendent's personal style.
- The morale of the staff.
- The existence, or the lack of crises in the schools or the community, and whether they force the school district to make hard decisions in a hurry.

Team Planning

Here is why these elements must enter into the thinking of the team planners:

- In very small districts, the entire administrative team could meet in a single room and conduct all business face to face. In the more populous districts, such a meeting would require a small stadium, so the process calls for a delegate structure and more written communications. Similarly, districts with small populations but large geographical expanses might find frequent meetings wasteful because of excessive travel time.

- State laws vary from one extreme to another on how they deal with administrators in the area of collective bargaining. Obviously, the team plan must recognize legal restrictions on who may participate in what kind of meetings and what kind of decisions team members would be expected to make. Items covered by the contract could not be brought before union members when sitting as a team, and in some cases the

sharing of information could constitute an unfair labor practice.

- Let's face it. A superintendent who is used to making spot decisions on his (her) own without staff input will have a more difficult time adjusting to a team game, and so will the staff. Although organizational plans are not supposed to be geared to individual personalities, it stands to reason that the potential trauma to the superintendent and staff should be considered, both in the style of team organization created and the length and type of staff orientation.

- While the team concept is designed, in part, to raise staff morale, a lot depends on how far down you begin. Imposing this type of plan in a low morale atmosphere will bring more skepticism than cooperation, at least in the beginning. This situation may require a longer developmental period with more staff involvement and a strong public relations component. This stage could be shortened considerably in a district marked by high morale and staff cooperation.

- Once again, you have to be realistic. If a district is under the gun from the courts over desegregation or the community over school closings, it may not be able to take the luxury of an extra month or two to deliberate decisions. The game plan here may call for quicker turnaround on key questions.

Chapter 4

DRAWING THE LINES:

Organizing the Team

With the pertinent traits of your district firmly in mind, it's time to begin drawing those circles and lines on your organization chart. It really won't help to look in a book, even this one, for a plan to follow, because no district is exactly like yours. If it's all going to work, your plan should fit the unique characteristics of your district, your superintendent, and your board.

Who is on the Team?

First, the question of team makeup.

All administrators in the district, by definition, should be considered members of the "administrative team." This recognition demonstrates your philosophical commitment to the idea. It doesn't mean *all administrators* will sit around a table at one time and debate the question of the day. The actual task may become one of creating a manageable body to perform the specific functions of deliberating and advising.

From here on we will use the word "team" to refer to either the entire administrative staff or a representative group. Depending on the size of your district, you will know which one we mean. The structure of the group called the "team" is governed largely by the size and complexity of the district. While an infinite number of variations might be possible, existing school system teams generally fall into four basic categories:

- The so-called ***single model,*** in which the superintendent meets with one group that

includes all administrative team members or their representatives.

- The ***dual model,*** in which the superintendent meets with two teams: one that includes all the team members or their representatives, and another that includes only the central administrators.

- The ***multiple model,*** in which the superintendent meets with the entire team, and also with other groups composed of segments of the team.

- The ***divisional model,*** in which the superintendent meets with several groups representing different segments of the team rather than the total team itself.

If your district has five central administrators and ten principals, it would be natural for that entire group to meet as a single team. A group of that size is manageable, and suspicion would result from trying to segment it.

The larger the district, the more you may have to look at the divisional or multiple approaches. Depending on the number of people and interest groups involved, you could move toward creating several teams. But here again, your decision will hinge on how deeply committed you are to the team approach in decision-making.

You can, for example, create one team made up of duly selected representatives of all the subgroups, such as elementary principals, secondary principals, curriculum supervisors, and so forth. Team members would be charged with taking questions back to their colleagues for

comment. This "linking pin" concept assures involvement of all groups within the organization while centralizing the final decision-making in a single body.

At the same time, you can create specialized teams to function in specified areas. These teams can be geographical if your district is divided by region, drawn according to high school feeder boundaries, or divided by job interest—such as elementary education, secondary education, business services, special education, and so on.

Another option. These committees can report back to a main management team or they can function independently, each meeting regularly with the superintendent to discuss their specialized topics.

With this approach, if the issue is high school graduation requirements, only the assigned special team would be involved. Proposed changes in group insurance coverage would call for the business and personnel teams. And so on.

First Things First

The first question you must answer boils down to this:

Do you want a structure revolving around one super administrative team that embraces all areas and interests, or do you want a structure of many specialized teams, either standing or ad hoc or a combination of both?

Obviously, the single-team approach will be a bit less demanding of the superintendent's time, because one meeting can take the place of several. But the specialized teams can guarantee that the information relayed back for decision-making will be more reliable because it comes

from the people directly involved in that area.

Again, your answer will be based in large measure on personal preferences as well as district characteristics. There is no "right" way to do it. It would be advisable, however, under any circumstances, even if you pick the specialized or divisional team approach, for the superintendent to inspire a feeling of team play among the top administrative staff. The superintendent should actively involve people like the assistant superintendents, business manager, communications director and personnel officer in all major decisions.

The Right Setup for Your District

We have listed many possibilities. But how do you come up with the team structure right for your district?

Selecting the right structure should itself be a team effort of a task force appointed by the board at the recommendation of the superintendent. This group should be small, no more than a dozen or so, and contain a cross-section of the interests that will eventually be represented on the team or teams themselves. Obviously, if an administrators association exists, it can be the nucleus of the task force.

Of course, the superintendent and board can give the committee a little push in one direction or another. That's their prerogative. But task force members should have the leeway to analyze the situation carefully and base the plan on their findings. With this approach, the plan can reasonably be expected to work in that specific district.

The group could use a checklist to guide its thinking.

Here's what to do. Down the side of a sheet of paper, list all the external factors affecting the district (size, geography, fiscal pressures, etc.) and all the internal characteristics (morale, educational priorities, enrollment trends, whether the administrators are organized or unionized plus any other overriding issues). Then draw vertical lines, labeling the boxes across the top with various types of team approaches. Check off how many of the district's characteristics will be best served by a particular approach. It may be that one specific structure will meet more of your district's needs than any other. A new twist here or there could accommodate any leftover characteristics.

Team Approaches

	Single Model	Dual Model	Multiple Model	Divisional Model	Option 1	Option 2
Twelve Schools						
1500 Sq. Miles						
Low Expenditures per Student						
High Staff Morale						
District-wide Goals Not Well Defined						
Declining Enrollment						
School Closings Possible						

Whatever structure emerges from this process, it must embrace all of the administrators' interests and concerns, and provide clear channels for them to hear and be heard. If even one of these concerns is ignored because it is inconvenient, or doesn't fit neatly into an otherwise tidy package, it could become the crack that will eventually undermine the dike.

Chapter 5

SOME OPERATING TIPS:

Rules to Live by

Your planning committee has drawn the lines and circles on the organization chart. It has compiled the interests to be represented on the team or teams and suggested ways of selecting the representatives. But the job is far from over, because now comes the critical question: how is it going to operate?

An Operating Plan

One strong word of warning here: It's not going to operate by itself. It will need strong and consistent leadership. But even before that, it will need a precise and comprehensive operating plan approved formally by the board and distributed widely before the team meets for the first time. As a document, it should stand alone as the gospel for the administrative team, and should include:

- ***The board policy*** that started the process in the first place. This, in effect, becomes the team's creed.

- ***The makeup of the team,*** and how each member is selected. Don't forget the administrators association. The president of that group should automatically belong to the team, and the executive director should be invited to sit in.

The Schedule of Meetings

Whether it is every Monday morning or every other Friday, it must be spelled out right here. If meetings are only to be called "as needed," that could be an early clue that you are not really serious about a team approach. Of course, there must be a provision for more frequent meetings during emergencies.

A Statement of Purpose

This could be an amplification of the board policy or, in modern management terms, a statement of goals and objectives. It should cover the team's dual role: to advise the board on policy and the superintendent on procedure.

A Monitoring Mechanism

The team should have a way of policing itself, of assuring that it adheres to its objectives and does not stray far afield. Operating procedures should include periodic sessions that allow team members to evaluate one another as well as the overall team performance. Is each person giving others the chance to air their points of view? Are some members dominating discussions? Do channels for communication remain open in all directions? If a problem does surface, there must be a prescribed means of privately disciplining team members when they don't play by the rules. This can be done by the superintendent, acting as the team leader, or by a subcommittee of team members. Of course, the form discipline takes must conform to various personnel policies of the district. In any event, one member's poor attitude or selfish behavior should not be allowed to drag the team into ineffectiveness.

The Procedural Guidelines

Anything to do with the operation of the team and its relationships to the rest of the staff, the superintendent, the board and the public should be spelled out in black and white. If you can anticipate the kinds of problems that might arise in times of stress, you can ensure smooth sailing even on stormy seas.

Some Important Principles

Once again, there are many ways you can go, but as this part of your plan takes shape, it must clearly address a number of overriding principles. These include:

- An assurance that all team members will get the agenda, and all other board items the superintendent receives in sufficient time to digest the material, discuss a situation if necessary, and make recommendations. Similarly, the board should be on the administrative team's distribution list.

- In the larger districts especially, a guarantee that all—repeat the word all--administrators will be apprised of all matters placed before the team and be given the time as well as the vehicle to make their feelings known. Depending on the size and complexity of the district, this sharing could range from midweek meetings of the principals association to an elaborate network of written communications. Whatever form they take, these communications opportunities must be given top priority.

- The method of coming to closure on an issue and resolving differences of opinion. There are many ways to go here, too, but the clue will probably be included in the original board policy. How much of a mandate was the team granted? It could be that the team will be only advisory, bringing information to the superintendent, who makes the decision after listening to the discussion. On the other hand, the team may be asked to arrive at a consensus so that all members, including the superintendent, are willing to live with the decision. Or it may vote formally and issue majority and minority opinions. Coming to grips with this question will require some soul searching by the superintendent who

is ultimately responsible for the decision. ***But however these differences are resolved, the board must be willing to wait for the process to run its course. Forcing a precipitous decision could undermine the very purpose of the team approach.***

A few observations here: a secure and confident superintendent should welcome dissenting opinions that come to the attention of the board. In fact, in these days of increasingly complex issues, a superintendent might be wise to come to the board with a series of options along with his or her firm recommendation. This approach gives the board that much more information on which to base its decisions. But remember, the legal structure of a school district cannot be superseded by a team plan. The superintendent is still the chief executive officer, and cannot delegate the ultimate authority of that position to a majority vote of the staff. Where you draw the line between these two horns of a dilemma may, in the final analysis, govern whether you get gored.

To put it another way, the procedure must balance two factors: how democratic are you willing to be without destroying efficiency, and at the same time how much authority should the superintendent retain without undermining the team's morale?

It's a tough decision, one that must be based on your unique situation. But most important, whatever that decision is, make sure you live by it.

One way to bring conflicting opinions and possible alternatives to the attention of the ultimate decision-maker is to require an educational impact statement as part of all proposed actions.

All Must be Involved

Of course, everything else you do means nothing if you cannot guarantee that *all* members of the administrative team, and remember we're talking about every administrator in your district, is involved in some way in decision-making. And it's not enough to send them papers and assume that "if they have a strong feeling one way or another they'll let me know."

The two-way communication between the superintendent and the grassroots administrators, even if funneled through a management team itself, must be structured and formal. Administrators in the field must be made to feel confident that their advice has been received and considered, even if not followed.

The educational impact statement, besides informing the superintendent and/or board of the probable consequences of a proposal, can also assure total participation by the entire administrative staff. But it must be cast-in-stone procedure in your team's operational plan.

Every administrator in the system should be advised of any proposed change in policy and given all the backup material needed to understand it. Enough time should be allowed to study it and to prepare an assessment of the educational impact of the move, with alternatives if desired.

The vehicle for transmitting these statements to and from the field would depend again on the size of the district and the makeup of the team itself. At the very least, individual members should state their positions, and those who represent various groups of administrators, elementary principals, secondary principals, and others, should be required to submit a statement synthesizing the views of their constituents. The

superintendent, in turn, should use these impact statements to develop an impact statement that will go to the board along with the appropriate recommendation. The board, in fact, might require in its procedures that such statements accompany all recommendations.

This process will fill many of the gaps in understanding that exist among members of the entire administration team and especially among middle managers, who often feel isolated. As true team members, middle managers are not stubbornly insisting that their advice be followed to the letter. All they want is to know that somebody listened to them before making the final decision, that they, too, have an impact on the district's educational program.

Chapter 6

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Let's Get Started

There you have it: not a model or a plan, because it would be presumptuous for anybody to prescribe what would work best in your district. But you should be able to see now that if your organization does not encourage teamwork in decision-making, it stands to lose much of the collective wisdom of key people. Just as important, it may also lose the wholehearted support of middle managers, who will find other ways to make their voices heard.

The move to a team approach can be evolutionary as well as revolutionary. It is not necessary to scrap all of the procedures in effect today and replace them with an entirely new set tomorrow. The process can be phased in over several years, giving you plenty of chances to detect trouble spots and make needed changes.

Finally, the characteristics of your district and the people in it may not lend themselves comfortably to a full-fledged team effort. But that doesn't mean you have to drop the whole idea. It does not have to be an all or nothing proposition. Many of the administrative team components we've outlined could fit neatly into a traditional administrative framework. It could be that, in time, a piecemeal approach could grow naturally into a coordinated team process. However, even if it doesn't, you will have benefited

all along from the better information you will have gained for decision-making. You will also have gained from the higher morale of your administrative staff.

With taxpayers demanding more and more results from their tax dollars, public school systems are going to need all the help they can get. Doesn't it make sense to join forces and answer that challenge as a team?

Acknowledgments

The manuscript for this publication was reviewed and approved by the Joint Committee of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association. AASA wishes to acknowledge the work of Donald Hymes, who prepared the original draft, members of the AASA Executive Committee, the NSBA Board of Directors, NSBA Executive Director, Thomas A. Shannon, and members of the Joint AASA-NSBA Committee who reviewed the manuscript and made valuable suggestions which have been incorporated into this publication. Final editing and production were supervised by AASA Associate Director, Gary Marx.

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NSBA: Margaret S. Buvinger, Martha Crowley, Loretta Manwaring, Tess Norris, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Thomas A. Shannon

AASA: Olin Stratton, Richard Miller, Elden Amundson, Raymond Arveson, Alonzo Crim, and Paul B. Salmon.